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SUBJECT: CHARGE AND INTERIOR MINISTER DISCUSS KIDNAPPINGS,
SITE 4

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel V. Speckhard for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: Charge D'Affaires Daniel V. Speckhard met with Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani November 17 to discuss Site 4, recent kidnappings and the warrant against Harith al-Dhari. Charge emphasized to Bolani the importance of ensuring that all Site 4 warrants are executed. Bolani said his committees have completed their investigations and he is encouraging those implicated to turn themselves in to the courts. Bolani said that he expected that the officers would appear voluntarily, but also noted that large scale arrests were unlikely. Bolani said that MOI Major General Mahdi has received administrative punishment for poor performance in his management of Site 4 and that additional punishment is up to the court. He noted that because of this incident, Mahdi has lost his powerful position within MOI and hinted that this would allow further action. Bolani believes that the recent kidnapping of dozens of Ministry of Higher Education employees was sophisticated and Iranian supported. He also pled
ged to do whatever he could to ensure that the American citizens abducted near Basrah in the 16th were returned safely. Bolani said that the Harith al-Dhari warrant is not political, but based on evidence including al-Dhari's possible involvement in the abduction and murder of British citizen Margaret Hassan in 2004. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On November 17, CDA and MOI Bolani met to discuss progress on the execution of the arrest warrants of fifty-seven MOI officers implicated in the abuse of prisoners at Site 4. Charge emphasized the importance on bringing into custody the indicted officers, especially in regard to MOI Major General Mahdi. Bolani stopped short of promising arrests, explaining that he had ordered the commanders of all the indicted officers to ensure that they appear before the court. It is the court's job to prosecute. CDA offered assistance in coordinating actions between MOI and the Ministry of Justice should it be required. Bolani assured CDA that he will continue to make difficult decisions to uphold the law, fight corruption, sectarianism, and uphold human rights. In this, Bolani emphasized, he has Prime Minister Maliki's support.

¶3. (C) Bolani was very calculated in his responses to the Charge's repeated requests for clarification on General Mahdi's status. While Bolani first said that he is encouraging all those involved to voluntarily turn themselves in, he never mentioned Mahdi's name in conjunction with any existing judicial proceeding. He said that his committees recommended administrative punishment against Mahdi, and that is what will happen. Asked again whether this meant that

Mahdi would also be allowed to face the courts, Bolani sidestepped, saying "The case is open. If new evidence comes in, I will have to look at it. It is up to the judiciary." The Charge cautioned Bolani that he could expect continued USG pressure for action against Mahdi. The Charge noted that for rule of law to take hold, leaders must be accountable; the public will not believe in the system if the junior officers are punished harshly while the senior officers, like Mahdi, are spared. Bolani joked in reply that "perhaps they all will receive light punishment," but noted that Mahdi was a very strong, polarizing character, but now has lost some of that power and has been reduced to a more humble status. (Comment. In his remarks Bolani seemed to obliquely appeal for patience, citing an Arab proverb that "good health comes gradually" and noted that under his leadership MOI is reversing its poor human rights record and is now actually sending people to court and that he "was the one moving on these things." He implied that additional action against Mahdi may be better accomplished when he is even weaker. End Comment.)

¶4. Bolani spoke about the Ministry of Higher Education kidnappings. He said that the incident was an attempt to embarrass the MoI and the GoI (and the coalition). He believed that the planning, intelligence, and funding came from Iran. The kidnappers used English, and gained access to the site by claiming that they were there in advance of a visit by Ambassador Khalilzad. Bolani said that all but a few of those abducted had been released, but that it was impossible to know exactly how many employees were kidnapped due to poor record keeping. The Minister lamented that he was not able to get support from U.S. SpecOps forces when he requested. The Charge said he would inquire with MNF why that request was denied.

¶5. (S/NF) Regarding the al-Dhari warrant, Bolani assured the CDA that it was not politically driven but the result of evidence linking him to terrorism and possible even involvement in the 2004 abduction and murder of UK citizen and C.A.R.E. director Margaret Hassan. Bolani emphasized to the CDA that he is not non-political and is handling cases as they come to him. (Comment: Although key facts are still unclear, this incident will increase friction between Iraq's Sunni and Shiite political leaders. It will also increase popular Sunni mistrust for the GOI, particularly in the wake of the November 14 mass kidnapping at the Ministry of Higher Education. End Comment).

¶6. (S) The Charge concluded the meeting with a request that Bolani do all he could to affect the safe and speedy release of the four American and one Austrian citizen abducted when their convoy was attacked outside Basrah on November 16. The Charge noted that the incident took place in a PIC'ed province. Bolani said that he would do what he could and mentioned that he had already offered a reward for their release.
SPECKHARD